SARNATH

Archaeology, Art & Architecture

Archaeological Survey of India

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S A R N A T H

Archaeology, Art & Architecture

by

B.R. Mani

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Preface

Sarnath, Archaeology, Art & Architecture is an attempt to initiate publication of guide books on significant Indian monuments in new format, helpful to both general visitors and researches in understanding the nature of monuments and antiquarian remains.

Sarnath where Lord Buddha turned the wheel of law in motion, in due course of time, had become a significant place of pilgrimage for the Buddhists who consider it to be the birth place of Buddhism. Historic records confirm that the place remained venerated by all the principal religions of ancient India as many historical and legendary personalities were associated with it. The present guide book by Dr B.R. Mani not only provides relevant information about the ancient site and its structures, but also familiarizes general visitors with the beautiful and artistic sculptures, and antiquities recovered during series of excavations conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India in the past, mostly illustrated with colour photographs. In short, this is a book that one interested in archaeolgy, art and architecture of Sarnath may like to possess.

(C.Babu Rajeev)
Director General
Archaeological Survey of India

1. Location and Short History

Dhamekh stupa in 1830s

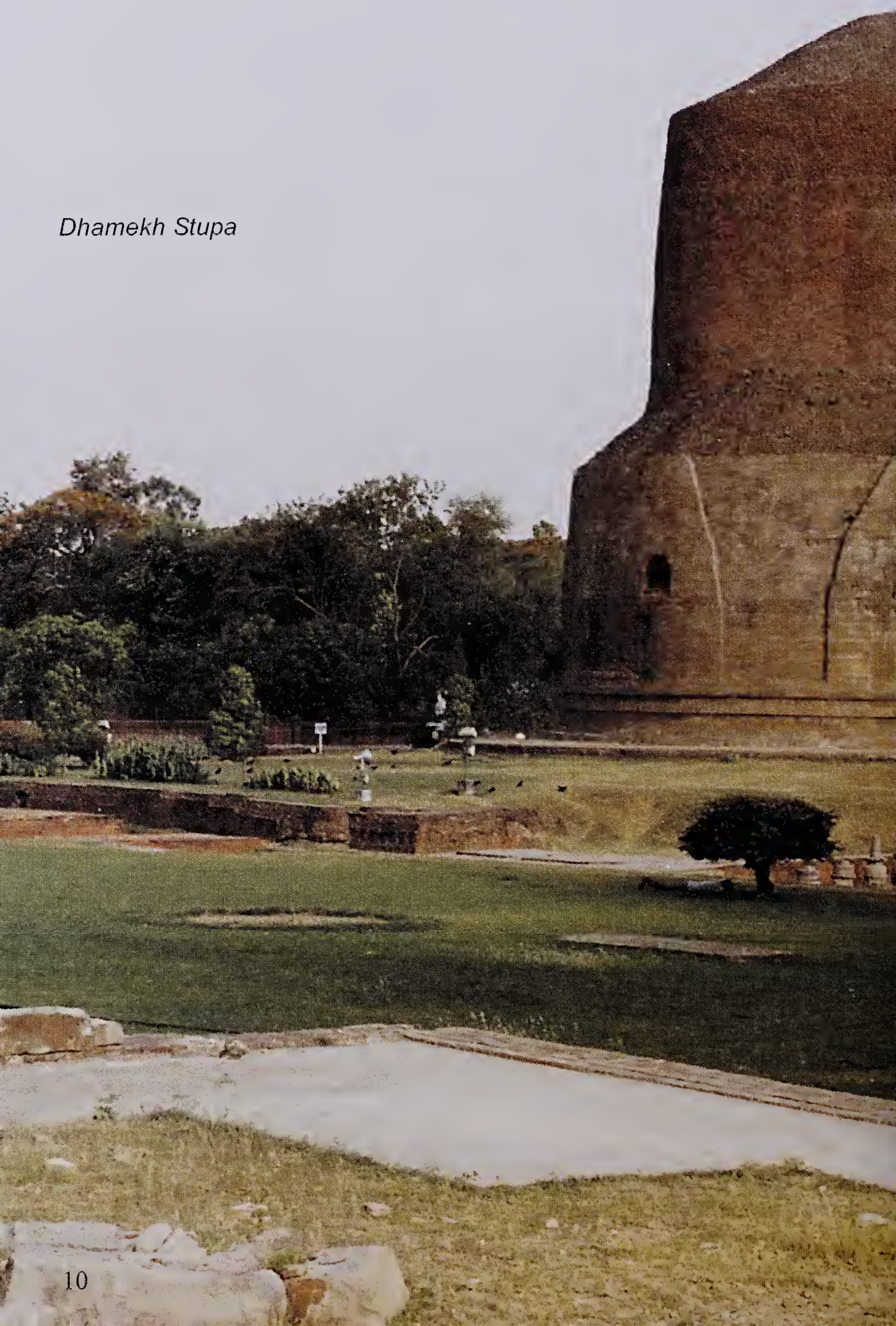
Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh is situated at a distance of 8 km from Varanasi Cantt. Railway Station and comes under the limit of Varanasi Municipal Corporation. It is accessible by any conveyance through a good metalled road from the city of Varanasi. There is a railway station at the place towards east at a walking distance.

Sarnath is a holy spot of Buddhism, as Buddha preached here his First Sermon. As per Bud-

Sarnath : The Site

dhist literature the place was known as Rishipatana and Mrigadava or Mrigadaya. The origin of these names is explained in the *Mahavastu*. The place was called Rishipatana, as it was here the bodies of five hundred Pratyeka Buddhas or Rishis fell after their attainment of *nirvana*; the name Mrigadava owes its origin to the fact that herds of deer roamed here freely as they had been granted immunity by the king of Banaras (Kasi), moved to compassion by

the spirit of self-sacrifice of Bodhisattva born as Nyagrodhamriga. In medieval inscriptions the place is referred to as the Dharmachakra-or Saddharama-chakra-pravarttana-vihara. The modern name seems to be a contraction



Dhamekh Stupa

of Saranganatha (lord of deer), still borne by the Mahadeva enshrined in a temple nearby. The place is sacred for the Jainas also as it is believed that Sreyansanatha, the eleventh Tirthankara was born near here at Singhpur.

After attaining Enlightenment at Bodh-Gaya, Buddha took the decision that he should preach his *dharma* to five erstwhile companions who were then staying at Sarnath. So he proceeded to this place and explained to them for the first time his teaching, which event in the Buddhist texts is known as the *dharmachakra-pravarttana*, 'Turning of the Wheel of Law'.

An inscription of the Kushan period found at Sarnath gives a partial record of this sermon.

Inscribed Parasol: 2nd Century AD

Buddha expounded here the Four Noble Truths (*arya-satya-chatushtaya*). The first Truth is that there is sorrow (*dukha*) in this world; the second relates to the origin and cause of sorrow; the third explains the cessation of sorrow; and the fourth expounds the Eightfold Noble Path (*arya-ashtangika-marga*), which leads to the end of sorrow and to the attainment of peace, enlightenment and *nirvana*. The Noble Path consists of Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation. Buddha told his disciples that there are two ways of life: the way of pleasures of the senses and of worldly enjoyments, which brings sorrow, and the way of the mortification of the flesh and the denial of pleasures. He held that both these extremes are to be avoided and he preached the Middle Way, the golden mean of leading a sensible life.

This First Sermon comprises a unique and frank intellectual statement of the basic problem of life as well as its solution. It is universally regarded as the essence of Buddha's teachings. Sarnath naturally became the

symbol and radiating centre of light throughout the Buddhist world.

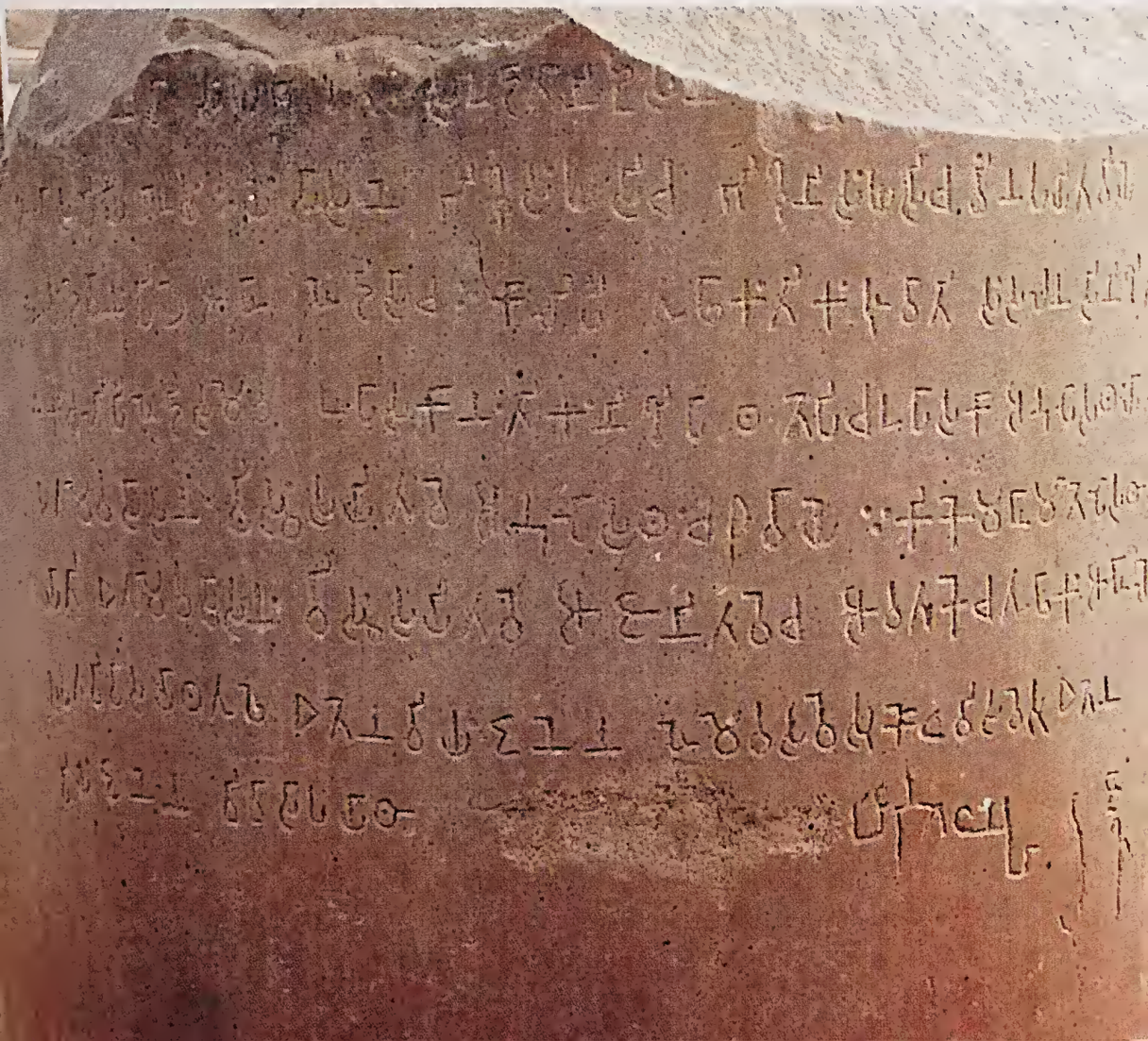
At Sarnath, Buddha also laid the foundation of his *sangha* or the order of monks. Yasa, the son of a rich householder of Banaras, together with his fifty-four friends, was attracted by his teachings and became his disciple. With them and the first five

Votive Stupas

monks (*pancha-vargiya bhikshus*) the Master founded the first *sangha* of sixty monks and sent them to various directions to preach his *dharma*.

After about two hundred years of the *nirvana* of Buddha, came Asoka, the great Mauryan emperor, who is rightly famous in the history of Buddhism. He waged a war against the people of Kalinga, but the suffering caused by it filled his heart with intense remorse and he decided to abstain from war for ever. This brought about a great change in his outlook and activities. He espoused the cause of Buddhism and employed all his resources and pious zeal to spread the message of Buddha. The charming life of Buddha exercised such a fascination on his mind that he decided to go on a pilgrimage to the holy

Asoka's Pillar edict



Monolithic railing : 3rd Century BC

places associated with the Master. At Lumbini (modern Rummindei in Nepalese Tarai), he caused a pillar to be erected on the spot where Buddha was born. At Sarnath he raised several monuments, one of which was *stupa*, about 30.4 m high, called the Dharmarajika stupa, which was crowned at its top by a monolithic railing. This stupa was pulled down in 1794 by one Jagat Singh of Banaras. The other monument of Asoka is the monolithic pillar which was once surmounted by the magnificent lion-capital, now placed in the site museum at Sarnath which is adopted by India as her national emblem. The capital was crowned by a *dharmachakra*, of which several fragments were recovered. The high *stupa* known as Dhamekh also seems to have had its origin in Asoka's time.

Of Sarnath during the Sunga period (second-first century BC)

not much is known, but the excavations have revealed more than a dozen railing-pillars of about the first century BC near the Main Shrine. They may have formed part of the stone railing which was put around a *stupa* or *chaitya* during the Sunga period, just as the *stupas* at Sanchi provided with railings at this time.

With the advent of the Kushans in north India (first century AD), Buddhism entered a new phase of religious and artistic activity. Mathura was the greatest centre of this renaissance, but Sarnath also prospered, and new monuments were added. In the third year of the Kushan emperor Kanishka's reign Bhikshu Bala of Mathura established at Sarnath a colossal Bodhisattva image of

Railing : 1st Century BC

Chhatra : 1st Century AD

Buddha : 5th Century AD

red sandstone, together with a proportionately large parasol (*Chhatra*) crowning it. With him were also associated in this act of piety the great Satrap Kharapallana and the Satrap Vanaspara, who appear to have been the local governors of

Banaras at the time of Kanishka. The monks of the Sarvastivadin Order were now strong at Sarnath and had established a couple of monasteries.

Under the rule of the Guptas (fourth-sixth centuries), Sarnath entered upon the golden age of its art. Its best images were made at this time, the Main Shrine was enlarged and the Dhamekh stupa was encased with floral designs carved in stone. Its importance increased as a religious centre. Fa-Hien visited Sarnath at the time of Chandragupta II (AD 376-414) and found four *stupas* and two monasteries here. A later inscription on the pedestal of a Buddha image mentions the gift of Kumaragupta, a probable reference to the Gupta emperor of that name (AD 414-55).

No inscription of Skandagupta has come to light at Sarnath, but the site must have continued to flourish during his time until it saw a setback during the Huna invasions. Alexander Cunningham found a hoard of images at Sarnath in a condition which indicated that the town had suffered from the fury of the Hunas. Of the later kings of the Gupta dynasty, we have an inscription of the time of Kumaragupta II, dated AD 473, and another of Budhagupta, dated AD 476.

Stupa with Buddha: 10th Century AD

The reign of Harshavardhana must have initiated fresh religious activity and restoration of the earlier buildings at Sarnath. Huen-Tsang(Xuan-Zang), the Chinese pilgrim, visited Sarnath and has left a vivid account of its monuments. He saw both the Dharmarajika stupa and the stone pillar of Asoka, the latter as stated by him to be 21.33m high and shining like a mirror. He found that in the great *sangharama* or monastery there were fifteen hundred resident monks following the Sammitiya school of Buddhism, and the Main shrine (Mulagandhakuti) had a big metal image of Buddha in the attitude of turning the Wheel.

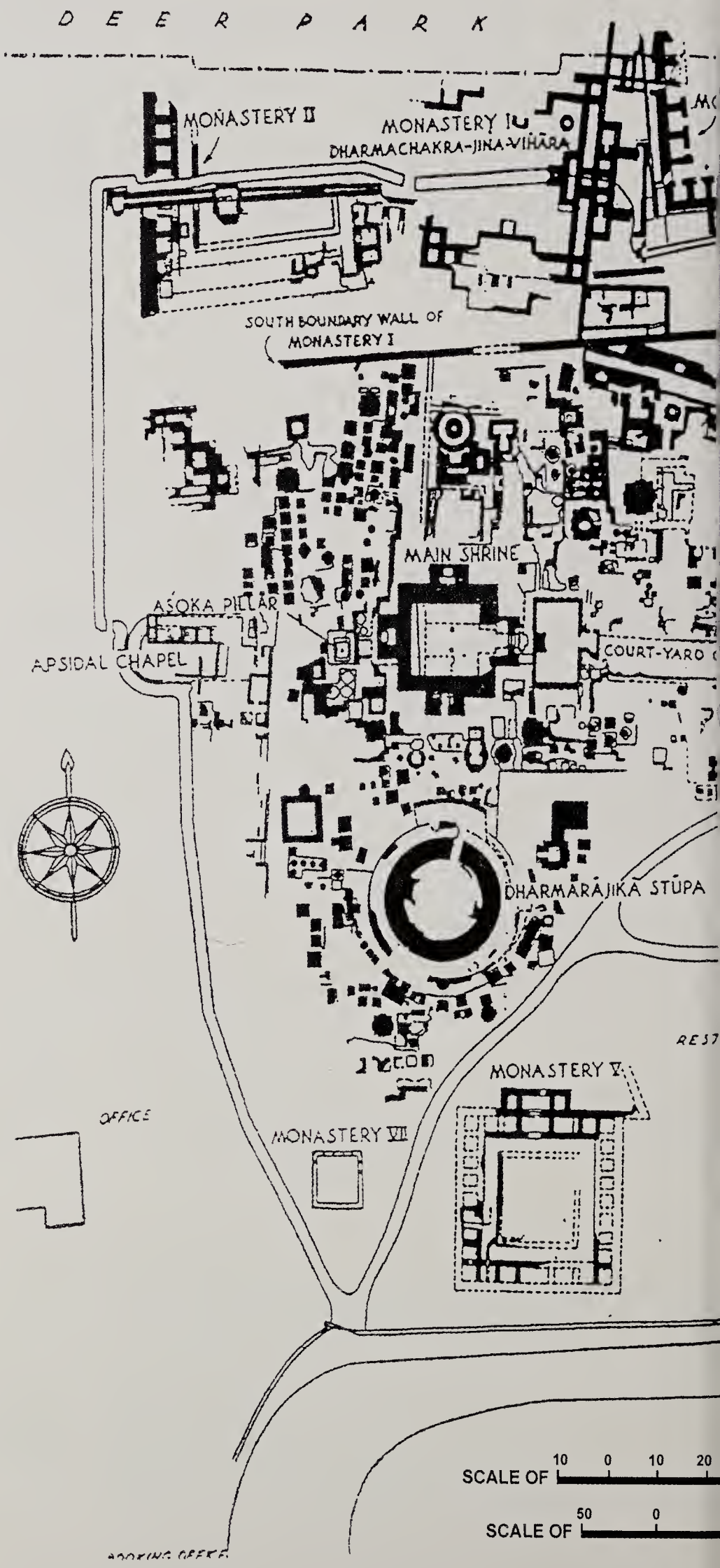
Sarnath continued to prosper during the reign of the Pala kings. But in 1017, when Banaras suffered under the spearhead of Mahmud Ghazni's invasions, the monuments of Sarnath also experienced a reverse. This is inferred from a record of the reign of Mahipala, dated 1026, when two brothers Sthirapala and Vasantapala found it necessary to restore the two monuments named Dharmarajika and Dharmachakra and also added a new shrine of stone sacred to the 'Eight Great Places' (*ashtamahasthanasaila-gandhakuti*). The meaning of the last name is not clear, but probably a bas-relief carved with eight scenes

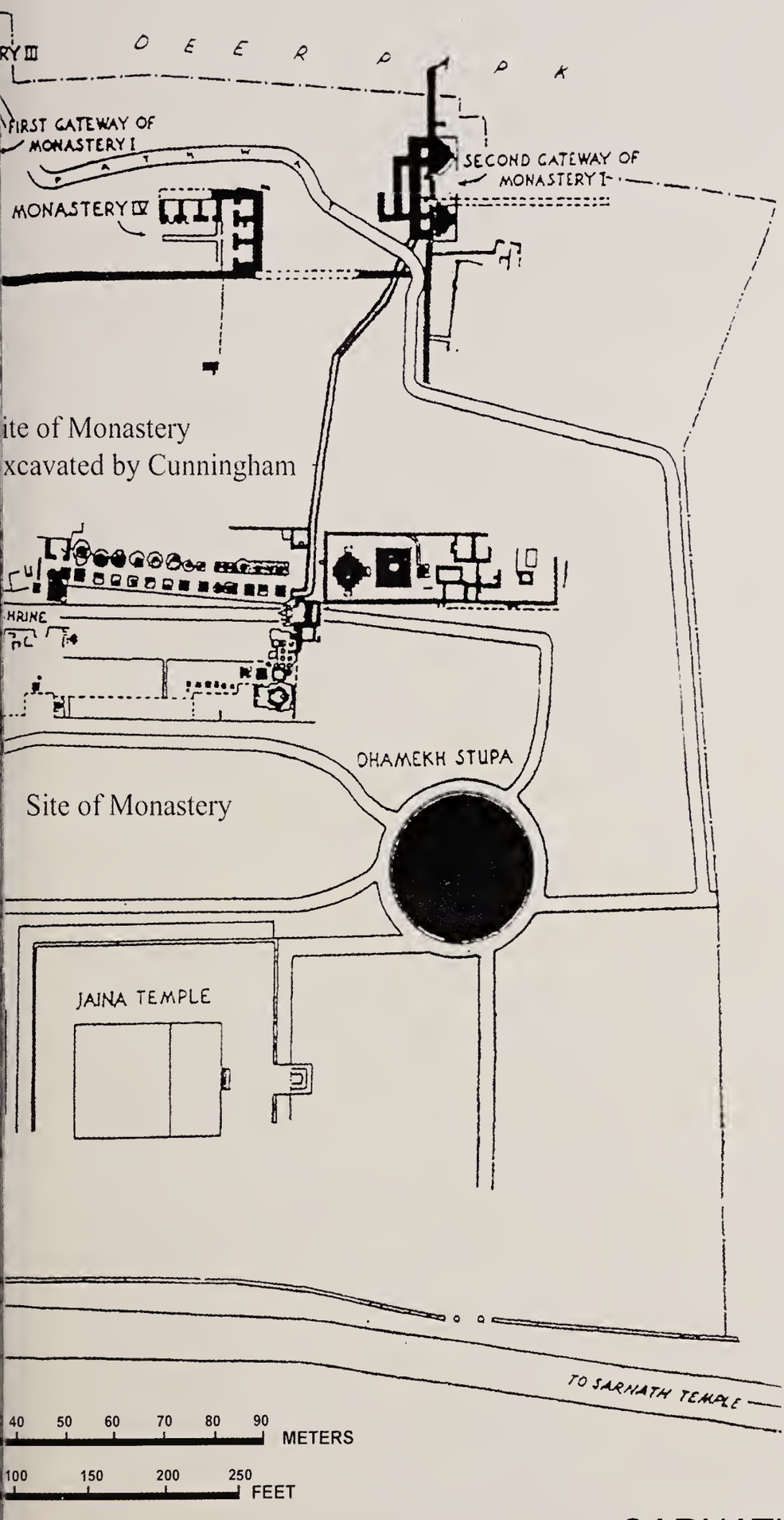
from the life of Buddha found at Sarnath was installed in this temple. We know that in the eleventh century a chronic warfare between Mahipala, king of Gauda, and Gangeyadeva Kalachuri raged for a long time, as a result of which Sarnath came under the sphere of the latter king. Six fragments of a stone inscription found in the monastery to the east of the Dhamekh stupa record that a Mahayana monk had a copy of the *Ashtasahasrika* holy text prepared in 1058 and presented it with other things to the order of the monks living in the convent known by the name of Saddharamachakra-pravartana-mahavihara.

During the next century Sarnath witnessed the foundation of its last great monument. Govindachandra (1114-1154) of the Gahadavala dynasty had made himself master of Kanauj, Ayodhya and Banaras. His queen Kumaradevi was a pious Buddhist and built a large monastery at Sarnath called the Dharmachakra-Jina-vihara. After this, the glory of Sarnath as a living centre of Buddhism faded for ever and Humayun, the Mughal emperor in the sixteenth century sought shelter in the ruins to spend one day after his plight from Chausa as in the inscription at Chaukhandi he is mentioned to have stayed here.

Votive stupa : 11th Century AD

2. Archaeological Excavations



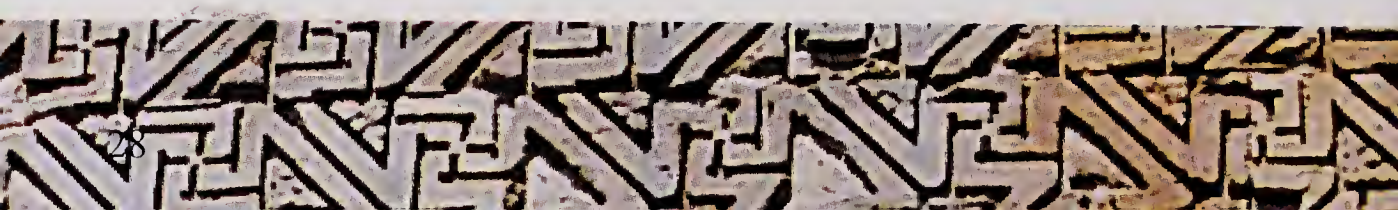


SARNATH

Plan of Excavations

Sarnath has attracted attention of scholars, archaeologists and those enthusiasts who searched for antiquarian remains for last over two hundred years. The earliest such reference is by Jonathan Duncan in 1794 in his account of the discovery of two urns by Babu Jagat Singh "in the vicinity of a temple called Sarnath". Jagat Singh, the Diwan of Raja Chet Singh of Banaras dug the stupa mound in 1793-94 for the purpose of obtaining building material, both stones and bricks for the erection of a market place in the city after his name. Bones, gold and silver ornaments, pearls, rubies etc. were found in a cylindrical marble box which was kept in a round box of sand stone besides a sculpture dated 1026 A.D. Later, General Alexander Cunningham could locate the round stone box which was left in the stupa and presented it to the museum of the Bengal Asiatic Society.

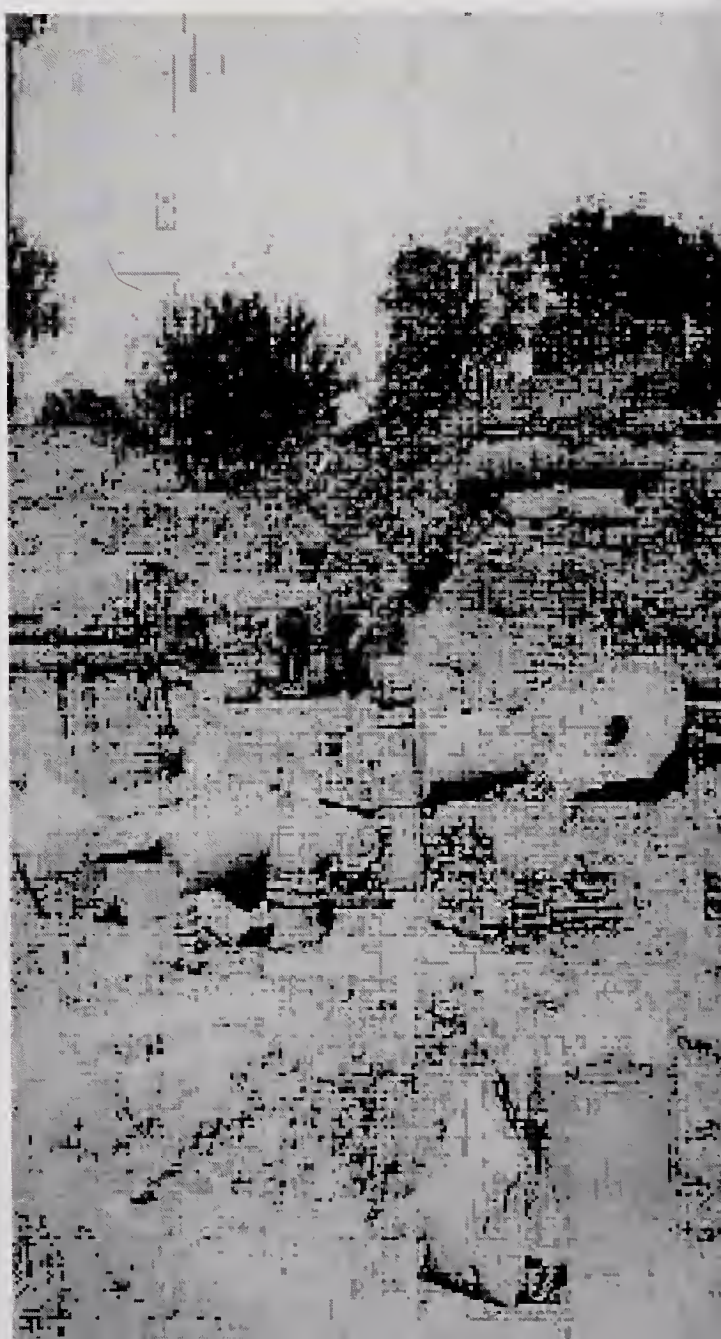
Col. C. Mackenzie was the first to start systematic excavations at Sarnath in 1815, but could not achieve any significant success. Cunningham took initiative for his great work at the site and has described his excavations at Sarnath in 1835-36, besides he has also mentioned the excavations by Major Markham Kittoe in 1851-52 which were completed by E. Thomas and Fitz Edward Hall after Kittoe's



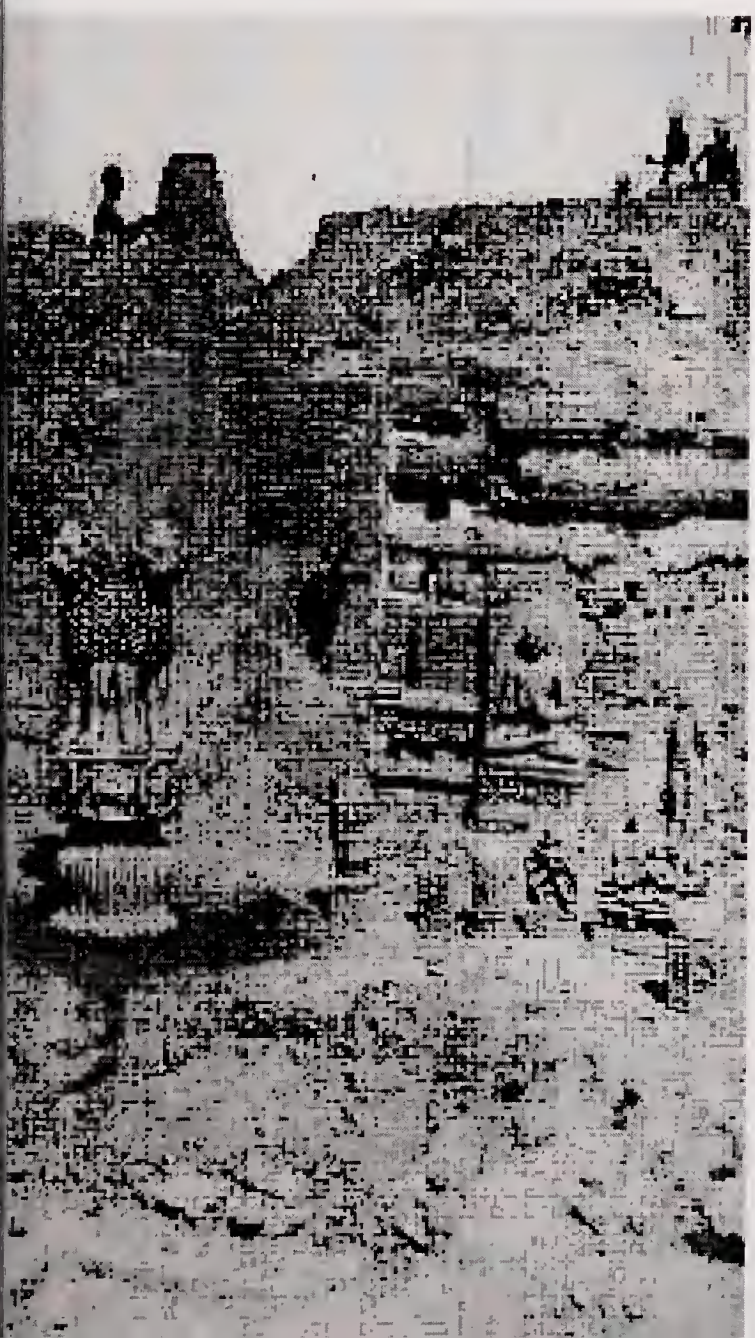
departure from Banaras. Due to untimely death of Major Kittoe at a young age, soon after his departure for England in January 1853, the details of the excavations were never published.

Alexander Cunningham began his excavation in December 1834 and closed it in January 1836 at a cost of Rupees 517 – 3 – 10. He excavated Dhamekh, Dharmarajika and Chaukhandi stupas, besides exposing a monastery and a temple towards north of Dhamekh. Attached with the temple, he located a chamber with sculptures and also the large block of stone which he identified with the stone mentioned by Huen-Tsang (Xuan-Zang) which was believed to be the stone over which Lord Buddha spread his robe after bathing in the nearby pond.

Cunningham himself climbed the Dhamekh on 18 January, 1835. His measurement of its diameter at base is 93 feet and height 110 feet. He started its excavation from top and found a stone slab inscribed with the Buddhist creed in the script of sixth century A.D. He also did some excavation round the outer wall of Dharmarajika stupa to ascertain its thickness. Later Kittoe and Thomas also excavated its inner parts and exposed the foundation of the outer casing. Cunningham in his later visit finally examined the diam



nath around 1905



eter at base which was found to be 49 feet and suggested it to be an ancient hemispherical stupa about 35 to 40 feet in height including the usual pinnacle. After addition of the brick casing wall in 1026 AD, its outer thickness increased due to 16½ feet thick wall, making the diameter to be 82 feet and height about 50 feet.

Cunningham proved Chaukhandi stupa to be a commemorative one after excavating it and identified it with the stupa mentioned by Huen-Tsang (Xuan-Zang) as located 2 or 3li to the south-west of the Deer Park Monastery, where the group of 5 companions declined to rise to salute Buddha, but on his coming near them struck by his divine glow, started paying full respect to him.

One of the most important structures exposed during the excavations by Major Kittoe in 1851-52 was the monastery (numbered as monastery V) with 28 separate apartments, courtyard and a well. It was believed to be a structure of no less than 3 or 4 stories in height. Evidence of ready-made wheat cakes, half cooked food and other grains suggest sudden and rapid abandonment of the monastery by monks. Kittoe exposed numerous votive *stupas* and shrines around Dhamekh stupa and a large quadrangle, called a hospital by him to the west of the Dhamekh.

Both Cunningham and Kittoe collected a large number of statues, stone umbrellas, inscriptions, bas-reliefs and other sculptured panels. Some excavations were carried out by C. Hone in 1865, but no significant find is credited to him. In 1877 H. Rivett-Carnac found a Buddha image there.

The nucleus of the ancient deer park was struck by F.O. Oertel in 1904-05 when he excavated and exposed the Main Shrine, Asokan pillar with its lion capital, the famous preaching Buddha, Budhisattva statue of Kanishka's year 3 and its stone umbrella along with 476 pieces of sculptures and 41 inscriptions.

Sir John Marshall resumed the work at Sarnath in 1907 and 1908 assisted by Sten Konow, W.H. Nicholls, Daya Ram Sahni and B.B. Chakravartti and covered a large area. He exposed structures of three monasteries of late Kushan period beneath the earlier exposed large area of Monastery I towards the north of the huge compound wall besides excavations to the east and west of the Main Shrine and the area of so-called 'Hospital'. H. Hargreaves in 1914-15 excavated the area to the east and west of the Main Shrine and exposed the apsidal temple of the late Mauryan period along with other later structures. The apsidal temple on the west of main shrine was located below the large stupa exposed by

Marshall earlier. The last major excavation work was conducted by Daya Ram Sahni in 1921-22 when he exposed structures between Dhamekh Stupa and the Main Shrine, the decorated brick stupa and the sub-terranean passage to the west of Monastery I upto Monastery II. The excavations continued for five field seasons in the area. Besides sculptures and other objects, ceramics recovered during excavations are preserved in the Archaeological Museum at Sarnath.

Ceramics from excavations

Ceramics from excavations

Ceramics from excavations

3. Monuments of Sarnath

Dharmarajika Stupa

Stupa, viharas (Buddhist monasteries) and shrines were constructed in Sarnath in between third century BC and twelfth century AD and were embellished with great works of art. Asoka, the great Maurya ruler started significant constructions at the spot where Buddha had turned the wheel of law in motion and credit for construction of Dharmarajika stupa and some shrines along with the erection of the monolithic pillar topped by the famous lion capital goes to him.

The **Dharmarajika stupa** was pulled down by the workmen of Jagat Singh in 1794 for transporting the building material to Varanasi for construction of buildings. A reliquary within a stone box was found. The excavation revealed six stages of enlargements of the stupa, originally built by Asoka.

The original structure raised by Asoka was 13.49 m in diameter with bricks of the size of 49.5 x 36.8 x 6.4 cm and others, slightly wedge-shaped, of 41.9 x 31.7 x 8.8 cm size. The first addition was made in the Kushan period with bricks measuring 38.1 x 26.2 x 7 cm size. The second enlargement came in the fifth or sixth century AD with the addition of circumambulatory path (*pradakshinapatha*), nearly 4.88m wide, around the *stupa* and encompassed by a solid outer wall, 1.35 m high, pierced by four doorways in the four directions. In the third enlargement in

Main Shrine :
Southern Chamber

the seventh century the *pradakshinapatha* was filled up and access to the *stupa* was provided by placing four monolithic staircases. The next two additions were made in the ninth-eleventh centuries. The sixth and the last encasing of the *stupa* took place when the monastery of Kumaradevi was built in the twelfth century.

Two outstanding images, viz., the colossal red sandstone Bodhisattva installed in the third year of Kanishka and the image of Buddha seated in the attitude of preaching, were found around this monument.

About 18.29 m north of the Dharmarajika stupa the visitor comes to the **Main Shrine**, a temple surrounded by a concrete pavement. The building is square on plan, 18.29m along each side, and faces east. It represents the Mulagandhakuti, which, according to Hiuen-Tsang, was about 61 m high. Its existing thick walls were obviously meant for supporting a massive and lofty structure. The temple is built of bricks and plaster with a mingling of carved stones from earlier structures. A standing Buddha image in the

Gupta style was actually found in the chapel on the south side. Subsequent structural additions within the principal chamber to save the roof from collapsing much altered the original shape of the chamber.

Below the foundations of the south chapel of the Main shrine Oertel discovered the plain and polished monolithic Asokan railing, each side 2.54 m in length and 1.45 m in height, cut entirely out of a single block of Chunar sandstone. It must have been once placed on the top of the Dharmarajika stupa.
The concrete pavement around the Main Shrine was added later when the brick walls were also added inside the main chamber to give support to the roof. Beneath the concrete pavement was found succession of layers, superimposed

Panel with worship of Stupa : 1st Century AD

one above the other at different periods and under the lowermost of them were found votive slabs (*ayagapatta*) of about the first century BC. A fragmentary railing-pillar has two inscriptions, one of second century BC and the other of about fifth century AD, when the railing-post was converted into a lamp-post for the Mulagandhakuti.

On the east side of the Main Shrine is its approach, in front of which is a large rectangular court and further to the east a long courtyard with a large number of *stupas* and ruined shrines of various sizes. To the west of the Main shrine stands *in situ* the inscribed stump, 2.03 m high, of the **Asokan column** along with its other parts. It was once 5.25 m high and was surmounted by the famous lion-capital with a crowning *dharmachakra* fitted above the heads of four lions, on a contrivance inserted into a groove in the centre. The pillar bears three inscriptions. The earliest one is an edict of Asoka in Brahmi characters, in which the emperor gives a warning to the monks and nuns against creating schism in the

Dhamekh Stupa

Elaborate Carvings on Dhamekh Stupa

sangha. In the third line occur the ringing words of the emperor, 'No one shall cause division in the Order of Monks'.

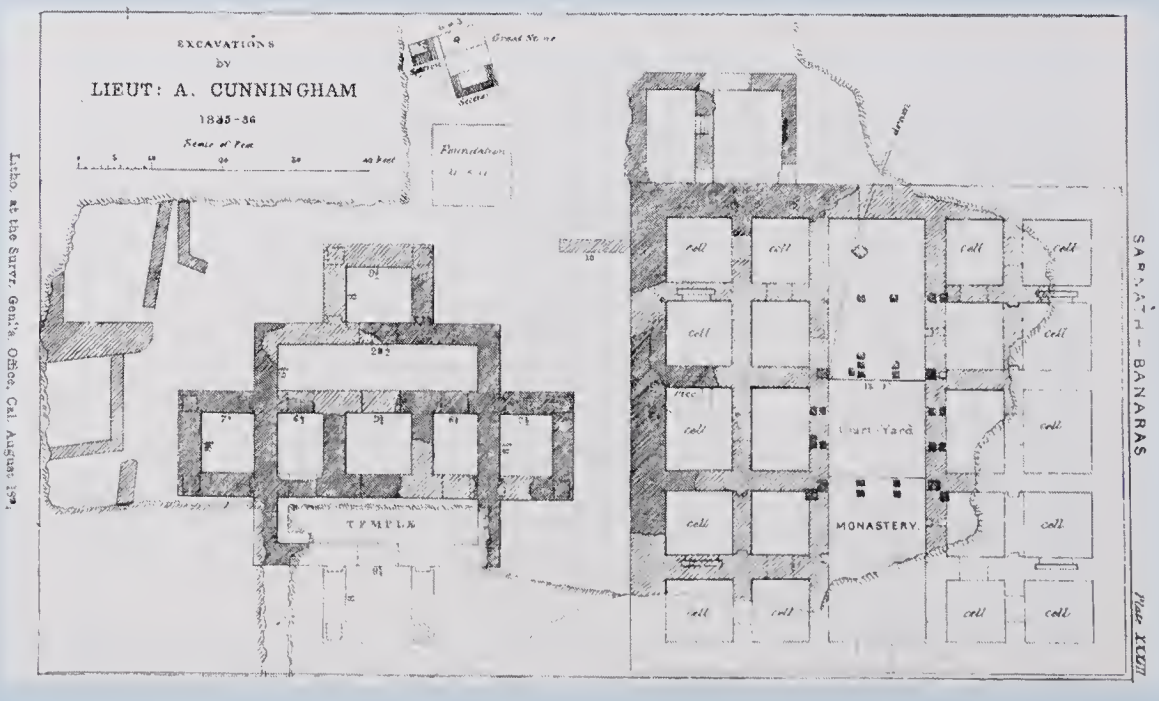
The second inscription is of the Kushan period and refers to the fortieth year of Asvaghosha. He was a ruler of Kausambi who also held sway over Banaras and Sarnath.

The third record is incised in early Gupta script and mentions the teachers of the Sammitiya sect and of the Vatsiputraka school. A few yards west of the Asokan pillar is located an apsidal chapel (*chaitya*-hall) of an earlier construction. The building was 25 m in length and 11.58 m in width with a semi-circular apse at its back, antiquities ranging in date from the Mauryan to the Gupta period were found in it. It was destroyed by fire in the post-Gupta period. Above it were found traces of a structure of later date.

The **Dhamekh stupa** is a solid cylindrical tower, 28.50 m in

diameter at base and 33.53 m in height or 42.06 m including the foundations. The structure consists of a circular stone drum to a height of 11.20 m resting on the ground without the usual rectangular basement. The stones in each layer were bonded by means of iron clamps. Above this drum rises the cylindrical mass of brickwork. Halfway up the base are eight niches which must have held images; immediately below them runs a broad course of elaborate carving with geometrical and floral patterns combined with birds and human figures. The carving seems to repeat the designs of the original cloth-covering called *devadushya* which was offered to cover the entire body of the *stupa* and was woven in a great variety of rich and beautiful patterns. This covering is considered to be a magnificent example of large-scale surface decoration and shows the high achievement of Gupta workmen in designing most intricate scroll-pattern.

Cunningham made a vertical boring through its centre down



Plan of Monastery excavated in 1835

Monastery I

to the foundations and found at a depth of 91.4 cm a slab with the Buddhist creed in the script of the sixth or seventh century. The slab in question was inserted inside the stupa at some later date. At a depth of 53.53 m from the top the shaft disclosed that the stonework gave place to brickwork belonging to an earlier edifice. It is difficult to state with certainty the event or spot that this *stupa* was intended to commemorate. As shown above, its old name was Dharmachakra stupa and it is not unlikely that it marks the spot of the preaching of the *dharma* by Buddha. From its luxuriant stonework the monument seems to have been considered by far the most important and sacred amongst the structures at Sarnath.

Monastery I is occupied by a central block of buildings. It has an open paved court on the west with rows of cells on the other three sides. The basement of the monastery, 2.44 m in height, is built of neatly chiseled bricks,

decorated with elegant mouldings on both the outer and dinner faces. All the halls and apartments of the monks have disappeared. This monastery had two gateways towards the east, there being a distance of 88.45 m between the two.

This monastery has been often identified with the Dharmachakrajina vihara, mentioned in the inscription of Kumaradevi, the queen of Govindachandra, who is credited to have constructed it in the early twelfth century AD. An alternate site of Kumaradevi's monastery has been identified with the monastery exposed by Cunningham in 1835 to the north of Dhamekh stupa near which the inscription of the queen was found at a later date.

The extensive area of the Monastery I was occupied in earlier days by monasteries II, III and IV. At the westernmost extremity of the site a special feature of interest is a covered passage leading to a small medieval shrine. The entire tunnel is about 54.78 m long with sidewalls 1.83 m high and constructed partly of stone and partly of bricks. Most of the sculptures found in this area are of the early medieval period.

Monastery II dates back to the early Gupta period. The ground plan of the monastery shows a central courtyard, 27.69 m square, surrounded by low walls, 99.1 cm thick, which must have carried the

pillars of the verandah in front of the cells and a row of chambers on the sides, from which traces of nine cells on the west have survived.

The Plan of **Monastery III**, which occupies a very low level, is similar to that of Monastery II. In its courtyard paved with bricks was found an underground drain. These cells in the south side were exposed with a part of the verandah in front. On the basis of the style of the carvings on the pillars of the verandah the monastery is considered to be the work of the late Kushan period. The average height of the walls is 3.05 m and the thickness of the walls shows that this edifice had not less than two stories.

The courtyard of **Monastery IV** is at a depth of 4.42 in below the level of the ground. The part so far exposed shows some cells on the north and east part of the verandah. As in Monastery III, the

Monastery IV

Monastery V

verandah-pillars were found inter-columned into a wall. The colossal image of Siva, piercing a demon with his trident, of about the twelfth century, was found lying above the top of the walls of the eastern cells.

Leaving the Monastery area by the second gateway and proceeding towards the Dhamekh stupa, the visitor will find a host of memorials consisting of *stupas*, chapels and concrete floors in various stages of preservation, ranging in date from the Gupta down to the medieval periods. The slab, with the Devanagari inscription of Kumaradevi recording the construction of her monastery, was unearthed in this area.

Monastery V excavated by Major Kittoe contains an open courtyard, 15.25 m square, a series of cells, 2.60 m by 2.45 m on the four sides and a well in the centre of the court. It is an example of a *chatuhsala-sangharama.* In front of the cells inside the courtyard was a verandah supported on pillars. The central room on the inner side was the reception or entrance-chamber (*pratyupasthanasala*). In front of it

is the portico consisting of one central approach and two guard-rooms. This structure gives a clear idea of the usual type of monasteries in the Gupta and later periods. A terracotta sealing with the Buddhist creed in characters of the ninth century was found in one of the cells.

Monastery VI – To the west of the Dhamekh stupa was located a lonely monastery, now covered, once believed to be a 'hospital' on account of a number of pestles and mortars found in it. It dates from the eighth or ninth century and was built upon the remains of an earlier structure of the Gupta period.

Monastery VII belongs to the early medieval period, constructed over the ruins of an older structure. It is of the usual pattern, consisting of an open courtyard 9.15 m square surrounded by a running verandah and ranges of cells on all sides. The cells have all disappeared. The condition of the bases of the verandah-pillars shows that this monastery and monastery V were destroyed by fire.

Monastery VII

A large number of votive stupas, mostly constructed on square plinth have been exposed around the Dharmarajika stupa and towards north and north-west of the Main Shrine including those in a double row along with the eastern pathway connected with the courtyard of the Main Shrine. Some of them contained stone images of Buddha and other Buddhist deities. Besides them, smaller shrines having a combination of brick-work and stone members attached to the structures have been located in different directions. Amongst them one circular shrine to the north of the Main Shrine is a significant structure which dates back to the Maurya-Sunga period with additions in the later periods. Its location in the cardinal direction to the north of the main shrine in relation to the apsidal structure on the west and Dharmarajika stupa on south suggests its significance. Some railing posts

Votive Stupas

Circular Shrine

of the first century BC found near this structure are important finds. Some star shaped *stupas* have also been located in different areas. Two structures with highly decorated brick work, one to the south-east and the other to the south-west of the Main Shrine deserve special mention as they depict the art tradition of post-Gupta period.

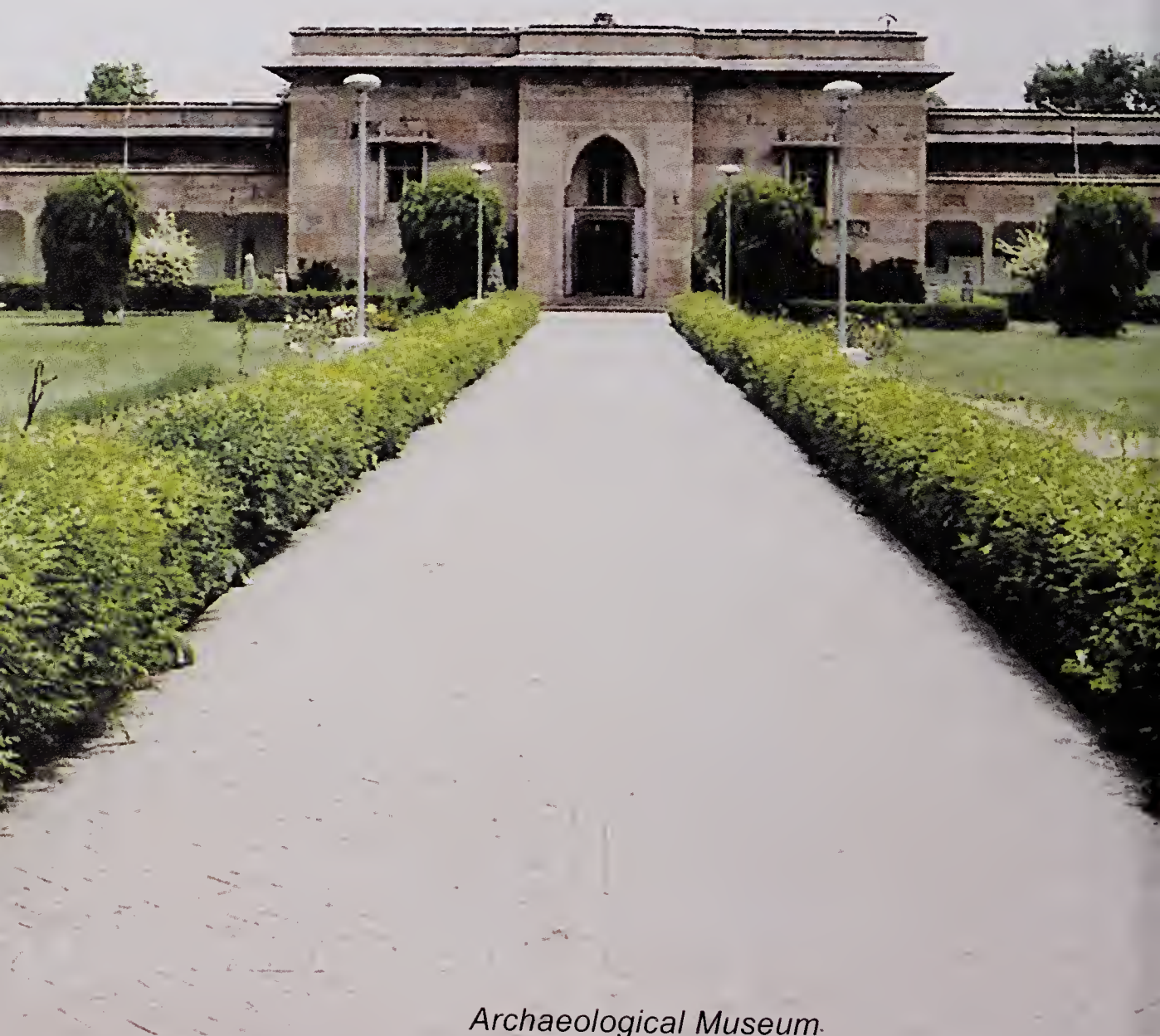
Apsidal Shrine

Chaukhandi is a lofty brick structure crowned with an octagonal tower. The octagonal tower is a Mughal monument built by Goverdhan, son of Raja Todarmal, in 1588, when he was the governor under Emperor Akbar, to commemorate a visit of Humayun to this place for one day. Cunningham drove a vertical shaft in its centre, down to the foundation in search of a relic-chamber, but nothing was

Chaukhandi Stupa

found inside. The outer walls of the three terraces were provided with niches for statuary. An image of Gautama Buddha seated in dharmachakra-mudra, a Bodhisattva and two beautifully carved bas-reliefs representing leogryphs and gladiators found at this site, are in the Gupta style and show that the monument existed in the Gupta period as a terraced temple.

4. Sculptures and Antiquities in the Archaeological Museum



Archaeological Museum

Asokan Lion Capital

The Archaeological Museum at Sarnath was planned in 1904 as a site-museum to house the antiquities unearthed there. The building was completed in 1910 and, as it now stands, forms one-half of the plan of a complete *sangharama*. The sculptures are arranged in the Main Hall, four galleries, and in verandahs. The most magnificent sculpture of Mauryan art is the lion-capital, which once crowned the Asokan pillar. It measures 2.31 m in height and originally consisted of four parts from bottom upwards, viz., (i) bell-shaped vase covered with inverted lotus-leaves, (ii) a round abacus, (iii) four seated lions emerging from one block, and (iv) a crowning *dharmachakra* with thirty-two spokes, of which only four fragments were recovered. The

Shrine with decorated bricks

four crowning lions are of vigorous workmanship and are sculptured with great naturalism. The eyelids have holes for pins to keep in position the gems that were fixed in the sockets of the eyes. There are four running animals on the abacus, namely an elephant, a bull, a horse and a lion, each separated by a smaller wheel or *dharmachakra*. The lion-capital is one of the great masterpieces of art of all times.

Stone Heads : C. 4th - 5th AD

The symbolism of the capital has been variously explained. The simplest explanation appears to be that the crowning *dharmachakra* symbolized the *dharma* or law, the four lions the roaring form of Buddha (Sakyasimha) facing the four directions, the four galloping animals, the four quarters as laid down in Buddhist texts in connection with the Anotatta lake, the four *dharmachakras* the intermediate regions, and the lotus with its overflowing leaves the symbol of creative activity.

A few broken human heads and animal and bird figures in Chunar sand stone with typical Mauryan polish were also recovered during excavations.

Stone Heads : C. 3rd Century BC

Railing : 1st Century B.C.

Amongst the masterpieces of Sunga art, the railing of three pillars of the first century BC is decorated with various sacred symbols, e.g., *bodhi*-tree, *dharmachakra, triratna, stupa,* etc.. An interesting capital of a pillar of the first century B C is carved on the sides with Ionic volutes and palmettes. One of its faces is decorated with a spirited horse carrying a rider, and the other with an elephant carrying a *mahaut*. The museum has a broken figure of a Yaksha from the site and another from nearby village Akatha.

A colossal Bodhisattva (Buddha) of red sandstone dedicated by Monk Bala in the third year of the reign of Kushan emperor Kanishka is powerfully built and is expressive of the best traditions of Mathura school of sculpture in early Kushan art. The octagonal shaft now set up behind the statue once carried a beautifully carved umbrella exhibited at the northern side of the room. There is an inscription on the post and also on the pedestal in Kushan Brahmi script recording the details of the installation of the image. Two more colossal Bodhisattva images in local sand stone of Chunar with *chhatra* were installed in the Kushan period and were painted red. These Kushan standing Bodhisattva statues provided the idea of making of such sculptures in the

Bodhisattva :
1st Century AD

Bodhisattva : 2nd Century AD

Bodhisattva :
2nd Century AD

Gupta period when the artists refined the face and body features of Buddha and made the drapery transparent, illustrating the most striking conception of the rhythmic notes of sculptural sequence capable of transmitting passion into the emotion of self-renunciation. Thus originated the Sarnath School of Art, the sculptors of which produced thousands of artistic images at Sarnath and regions around.

There are some important Buddha images in standing and seated postures. They are marked by typical Gupta fea

Yaksha :
1st Century AD

Standing Buddhas: 5th Century AD

Preaching Buddha : 5th century AD

tures, namely, a halo at the back with a lotus-pattern, short curly hair covering the head, serene meditative expressions on the face, transparent drapery covering both shoulders and an elegant bearing of the body.

The Buddha image, 22 E, belongs to the reign of Kumaragupta II, dated in the year 154 of the Gupta era (A D 473). It was dedicated by a Buddhist monk named Abhayamitra.

The seated Buddha image, B(b) 181 showing Buddha cross-legged in the attitude of preaching , is one of the most exquisite creations of Gupta art. The halo is carved with a pair of celestial figures and conventionalized floral scroll-work. Bas-reliefs and other sculptures of the Gupta period are also displayed in the Museum.

C(a) 1 is a stele showing scenes from Buddha's life in four panels, namely 9i) Birth (*jati*), (ii) Enlightenment (*sambodhi*), (iii) First Sermon (*dharmachakrapravartana*) and (iv) Decease (*nirvana*). Another stele in C(a)3, illustrates the eight events in the life of the Buddha. The four principal ones are the same as in the preceding one and are carved in the four corners of the slab. The four secondary scenes are carved in two in between them and illustrate the presentation

Standing Buddha:
5th Century AD

Scenes from Buddha's life : 5th-6th Century AD

of honey by a monkey to Buddha, Buddha taming the recalcitrant elephant Nalagiri, Buddha's decent from the heaven of thirty three gods and the great miracle of Sravasti when Buddha multiplied his form a thousand fold.

Standing Buddha : 5th Century AD

Among the other interesting sculptures mention may be made of an image of Maitreya of the early Gupta period and several other images such as Siddhaikavira holding a long lotus, one of the forms of Manjusri standing between two Tara images, Lokanatha, Nilakantha Lokesvara and Vajrasattva. A sculpture of Hariti with broken head was found by the author in 1981 in the adjoining village Baraipur towards east of the site which is now displayed in the museum. Artistically it represents late Kushan and early Gupta phase and the name of Srigupta, the first Gupta king has been read on it as one who installed it.

Buddha : 5th-6th Century AD

The show-cases also contain terracotta plaques, carved bricks, stone and stucco heads, seals and sealings, iron implements, pottery and other artifacts found during excavations at Sarnath.

Images of goddess Mârichi, whose chariot is drawn by seven boars along with images of Uchchhushma Jambhala with his prajnâ-Vasudhârâ, Agni, Karttikeya and Chaturmukha Brahma are interesting exhibits. Some sculptures of Siva, Vishnu and Surya and a few Jaina pieces confirm the theory of a school of art flourishing at Sarnath from

Hariti : 3rd - 4th Century AD

Buddha :
5th Century AD

Siddhaikavira:
6th Century AD

Buddha :
5th-6th Century AD

Bodhisattva :
5th Century AD

Standing Buddha:
5th Century AD

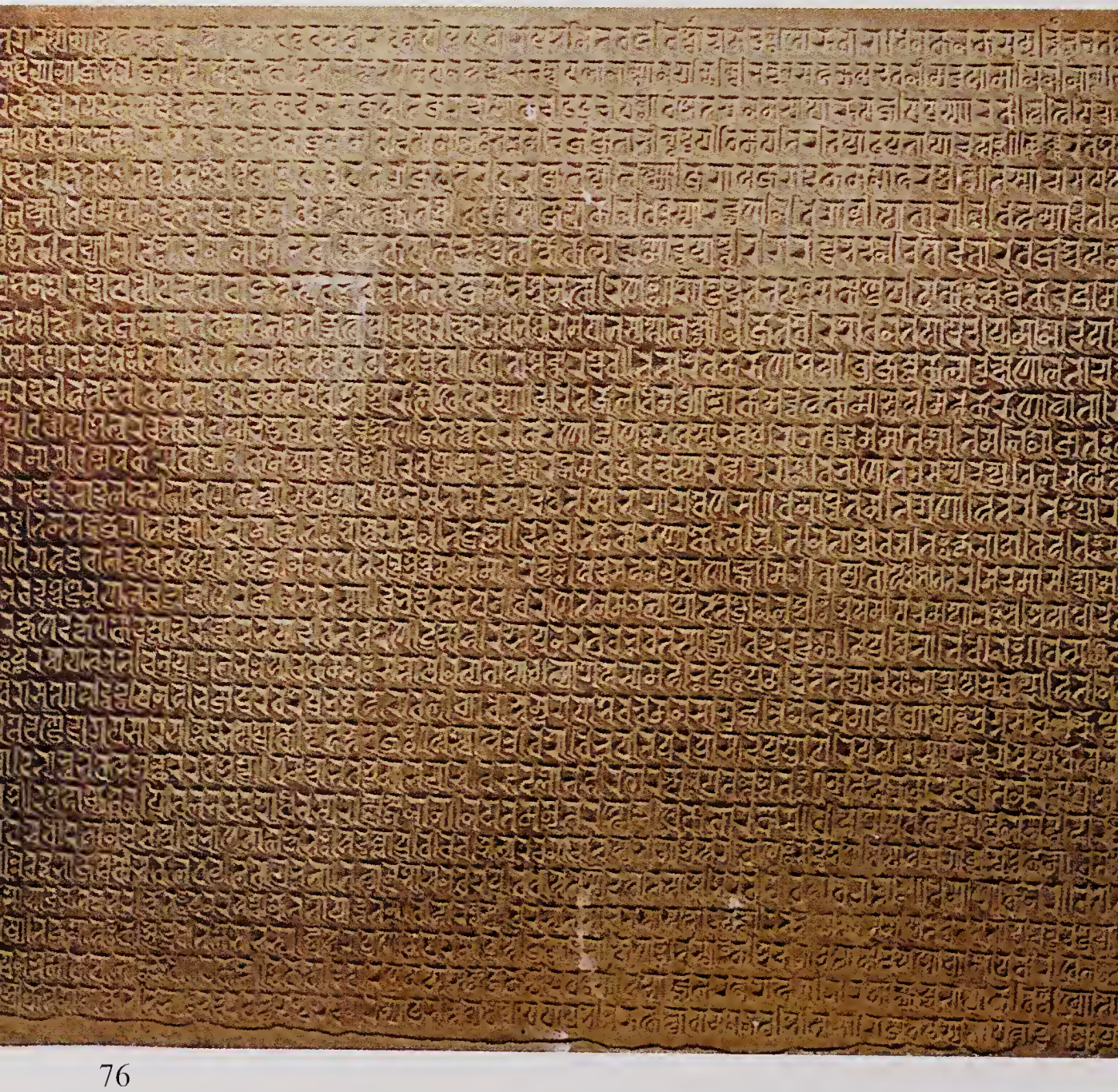
Gupta period onwards. Interesting among these is the early medieval colossal Siva killing the demon Tripura, an unfinished more than 4m high, sculpture, found over the debris above monastery IV.

Architectural members including highly decorated lintels, doorjambs, pillars, brackets, amalakas, pranalas, and other parts are mostly displayed in the covered verandahs of the museum. Stone votive stupas and miniature temples are also important objects displayed. The lintels depicting *Navagraha* panels, *Jâtaka* stories and other depictions are significant examples of Gupta and post-Gupta art. The lintel depicting *Kshantivadin Jataka* belonging to the Gupta period found towards north-east of the Main Shrine is noteworthy.

Nilakantha Lokesvara: 6th Century AD

Buddha : C.11th - 12th Century AD

Inscription of Kumardevi :
12th century AD



Vajrapani :
11th Century AD

Padmapani :
11th Century AD

Jambhala and Vasudhara :
12th Century AD

Shadakshari Mandal

Marichi : 10th-11th Century AD

Tara: C. 10th Century AD

1th-12th Century AD

Manjusri:
11th Century AD

Tara : 11th Century AD

Siva Killing Tripura :
12th Century AD

Agni :6th Century AD

Lintel with Navagraha : 10th Century AD

Lintel with Navagraha : 10th Century AD

Uma Mahesvara : 10th Century AD

Bronze Avalokitesvara : C. 9th Century AD

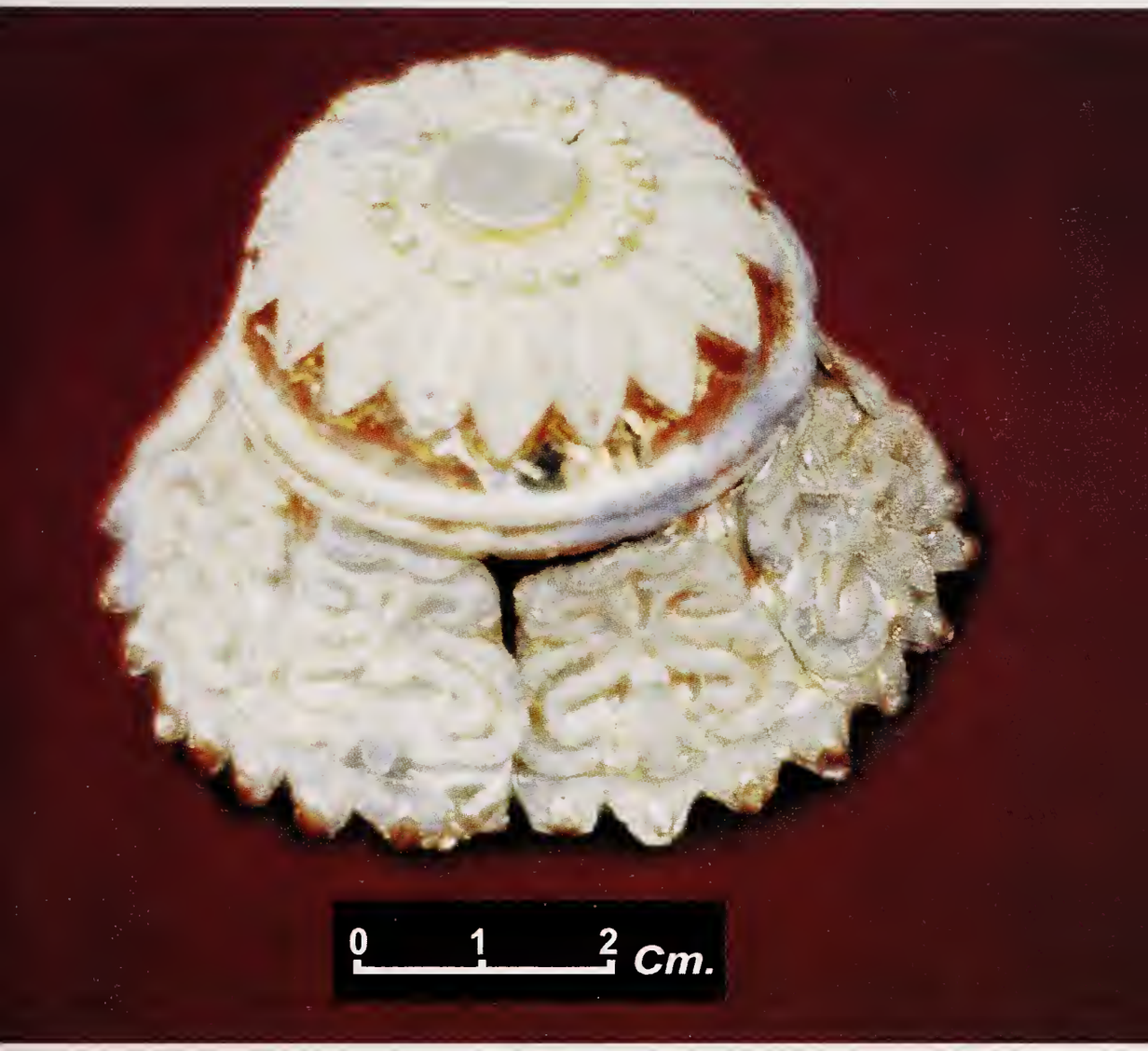
Copper vessel : C. 9th Century AD

Miniature Shrine :
12th Century AD

Stucco heads : 4th Century AD

The museum is also in possession of clay and copper-bronze objects covered with thin sheets of gold foil discovered in an earthen pot during 1990-91 in the Burmese monastery which is located adjoining the site to its west. The hoard comprises small sculptures of Buddha and human and semi divine figures, horse, *triratna*, *dharma chakra*, small and large beads discs, gold leaves, *stupas* or *stupa*- shaped

caskets and replicas of pomegranate,datable to first century BC – first century AD besides copper bells and beads of semi-precious stones and pearls.



Gold objects :
1st Century AD

Gold objects : 1st Century AD

Anagarika Dharmapala who came from Sri Lanka established Maha Bodhi Society in Sarnath and Mulagandhakuti Vihara temple was erected in 1931 by the side of which was transplanted a sapling of Bodhi tree from Anuradhapura which belongs to the family of original Bodhi-tree. Archaeological Survey of India presented Lord Buddha's relics from Taxila and Nagarjunakonda for enshrinement in the temple. Burmese, Sri Lankan, Chinese, Tibetan, Thai, Korean and Japanese temples and monasteries have been established in Sarnath in the twentieth century. The Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies a deemed to be University is the significant institution in Sarnath for higher Buddhist tudies and research.

5. General Information

Arriving in India

When to come

The best time to come to India, especially if you are planning to visit Sarnath, is between October and March. During these months the weather in the plains of north India is pleasant. During the winter months of December and January the day temperature is around 18° C and the night temperature could go down to 5° C.

The summer months of May and June are really hot and the temperature could rise to an oppressive 46° - 47° C. After the scorching heat the monsoons arrive around mid-July and the rainy season stretches for a couple of months.

What to wear

India does not have a fixed dress code, but it would be sensible to wear clothes that do not attract unnecessary attention. For travelers visiting Sarnath in winter light woolens such as a cardigan and a windcheater are usually enough. If you happen to visit Sarnath or Varanasi in the summer, wear loose cotton clothes and cover your head with a hat.

Health

Your health during your travel in India depends on three things: Precautions taken before arrival, day-to-day health care, and efficiency in tackling emergencies.

For travel health, use your common sense and most importantly carry your own first-aid kit after consulting a doctor.

Especially take care of what you eat or drink. This is the most important health rule.

The tropical sun is extremely strong during the summer months, so guard against sun-stroke and dehydration.

It is advisable to immediately seek qualified medical advice in case any ailment persists for more than a couple of days.

Hospitals

Indian cities have government as well as privately-run hospitals and nursing homes. The government hospitals have modern facilities, but due to a large turnout of patients, medical assistance is slow.

Arriving by Air

The international airports at Delhi and Mumbai provide the most convenient entry-points for the tourist traveling to the site of Sarnath.

Delhi

As the capital of India, Delhi has not only a well-serviced international airport but is also the obvious point from where to make connections for most parts of the country. Delhi airport is called the Indira Gandhi International Airport. It has two terminals: Terminal 1 (for domestic flights) and Terminal 3 (for International flights). Terminal 3 is 19 km(approx.) from the city centre at Connaught Place.

Airport Enquiry

Domestic Terminal
24 x 7 Call Centre
Ph. 3376000

International Terminal
24 x 7 Call Centre
Ph. 25652050

Airlines Offices

1. **Air India**
   3 Safdarjung Airport,
   Main Booking Office, Aurbindo Marg
   New Delhi - 110 003
   Ph. 2462 2220, Fax: 2469 4171
   Web site: http://www.airindia.in

2. **Jet Airways**
G 11/12, Outer Circle, G-Block,
Connaught Circus, Connaught Place,
New Delhi-110 001
Ph. 3989 3333
Web site: http:www.jetairways.com

3. **Indigo Airlines**
level 1, Tower C, Global Business Park
Mehrauli, Gurgaon Road
Gurgaon- 122 002, Haryana
Ph. Tel: 435 2500, Fax: 406 8536
Web Site: http://book.goindigo.in

4. **Go Air**
Go Air Terminal 1D, IGIA Airport,
Palam, New Delhi-110 037
Ph. 2567 4480, Fax: 2567 1951
Web site: http://www.goair.in

Mumbai

Earlier known as Bombay, it is extremely well connected by air and rail to most parts of the country, Mumbai airport is also called Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaja airport; and has two terminals, the international terminal at Sahar and domestic at Santa Cruz : international airport **is** 29 km from the city centre at Nariman Point, and the domestic terminal is some 6 km from the international terminal.

Airport Enquiry

Domestic Terminal
24 x 7 General/Flight Enquiry.
Ph. 66851010

International Terminal
24 x 7 General/Flight Enquiry.
Ph. 26813000

Airlines Offices

1. **Air India**
Air-India Building,
Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021
Ph. 2279 6666, Fax No. 22021096
Web site: http://www.airindia.in

2. Jet Airways
41/42 Maker Chambers
Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021
Ph. 3989 3333
Web site: http://www.jetairways.com

3. Indigo Airlines
17, Jolly Maker Chambers-II
255, Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021
Tel : 2202 7083, Fax No. 2202 2663
Web site: http://book.goindigo.in

4. Go Air
Go Airlines (India) Ltd.
1st Floor, C-1,
Wadia International Centre (WIC)
Pandurang Budhkar Marg,
Worli, Mumbai 400 025
Ph. 6741 0000, Fax No. 6741 0001
Web site: http://www.goair.in

Money

Indian Currency - The Indian Currency is called the Rupee. It is available in Denominations of 1,000, 500, 100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1. One rupee equals 100 paise. Coins in common use are those of Rs. 5, Rs. 1 and 50 and 25 paise. The 20, 10 and 5 paise coins have become redundant in the big cities, but they still have value in smaller towns and rural India.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are becoming increasingly popular in urban areas. All major international credit cards are used, including Visa, Ames, Mastercards.

STD Codes

New Delhi-011
Harayana-0124
Sarnath/Varanasi - 0542

Communications

Post Offices

Most small cities have local post offices providing the basic facilities; however, in the larger metros they offer a wider range of facilities, like telegraphs, fax and a courier service, operating under the brand name EMS-Speed Post. All post offices are open from 10 am to 5 pm, Monday to Saturday.

Telephones

Yellow-painted STD/ISD booths can be found in almost every small town or village today. Most telephone booths remain open till midnight. Some of these also have facilities for sending and receiving fax messages.

Selected Telephone Numbers

Rahi Tourist Bunglow, Sarnath.
Ph. 2595965, Fax: 2595967
Rahi Tourist Bunglow, Cantt.
Varanasi Ph. 2208413, 2208545
Archaeological Museum, Sarnath
Ph. 2595095
Conservation Assistant (ASI), Sarnath
Ph. 25955097
Post Office, Sarnath, Varanasi
Ph. 2595015
Police Station, Sarnath, Varanasi
Ph. 2595406

Forest Development, Sarnath, Varanasi
Ph. 2595841
Foreigners Registration Office, Varanasi
Ph. 2351968
Tourist Office, Government of India, Varanasi
Ph. 2501784
Tourist Office, Government of Uttar Pradesh
Ph. 2308916, 2308993
Fax: 2308937

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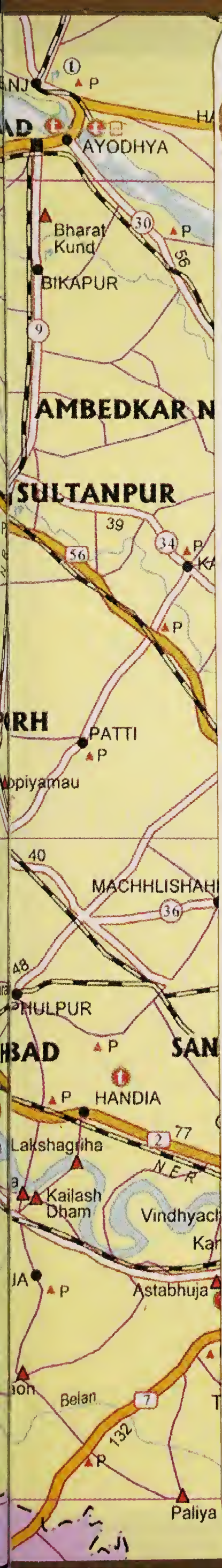
NAWABGANJ
BARABANKI
TARABGANJ
Daryabad
Chinhat
LUCKNOW
RAMSANEHIGHAT
MOHANLALGANJ
Hulaskhera
Nagram
HAIDARGARH
Shivgarh
Haliapur
Bachhrawan
Jagdishpur
Maurawan
MAHARAJGANJ
MUSAFIRKHANA
NORTHERN RAILWAY
Nandmahar
RAE BARELI
NORTHERN RAILWAY
AMETHI
DALMAU
SALON
Samspur Bird Sanctuary
PRATAP
Bela
KHUELAN DHAM
KHAGA
GRAND TRUNK ROAD
NORTHERN RAILWAY
Kara
KUNDA
SIRATHU
SORAON
Ramchaur
Shringverpur
MANJHANPUR
Yamuna
CHAIL
Jhusi
Aindri Dham
Kosam
Rajapur
KAUSHAMBI
MAU
KARCHANA
KARWI
Son
Manikpur
Kotwa
Katra
SIRMOUR
Simaris
Birsinghpur

SANT KABIR NAGAR
HARAIYA
AYODHYA
BASTI
KHALILABAD
MAGHAR
Bharat Kund
BIKAPUR
TANDA
Gagargarh
Kichcha Sharif
AMBEDKAR NAGAR
GOVIND SAHIB
Maharajganj
SULTANPUR
KADIPUR
PHULPUR
AZAMGARH
SHAHGANJ
PATTI
Chirayyakot
LALGANJ
Mehnajpur
MACHHLISHAHR
JAUNPUR
MARIAHU
KIRAKAT
SAIDPUR
SANT RAVIDAS NAGAR
Babatpur
Sarnath
BHADOHI
VARANASI
HANDIA
GYANPUR
Lakshagriha
Gopalganj
AURAI
Mughal Sara
Ram Nagar
CHANDAUL
Kailash Dham
Vindhyachal
Kantit
Narainpur
Astabhuja
MIRZAPUR
CHUNAR
CHAKIA
Ahraura
Belan
Tanda Falls
Sakteshgarh
Chandraprabha Sanctuary
Sirsi
Rajgarh
Paliya
Ghorawal
Deodari Ra
Water Falls

NAWABGANJ
TARABGANJ
BARABANKI
Daryabad
Chinhat
LUCKNOW
RAMSANEHIGHAT
MOHANLALGANJ
Hulaskhera
Nagram
HAIDARGARH
Shivgarh
Haliapur
Bachhrawan
Jagdishpur
Maurawan
MAHARAJGANJ
MUSAFIRKHANA
Nandmahar
RAE BARELI
NORTHERN RAILWAY
AMETHI
DALMAU
SALON
Samspur Bird Sanctuary
PRATAP
Bela
KHUELAN DHAM
KHAGA
Kara
KUNDA
SIRATHU
SORAON
Ramchaur
Shringverpur
MANJHANPUR
Yamuna
CHAIL
Jhusi
Aindri Dham
Kosam
Rajapur
KAUSHAMBI
MAU
KARCHANA
KARWI
Son
Manikpur
Kotwa
Katra
SIRMOUR
Simaris
Birsinghpur


AYODHYA
Bharat Kund
BIKAPUR
AMBEDKAR N
SULTANPUR
PATTI
MACHHLISHAHI
HULPUR
HANDIA
Lakshagriha
Kailash Dham
Vindhyach
Astabhuja
Belan
Paliya
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